

Copier Careers White Paper

Fitting the Bill: Recognizing Good Service Technician Candidates When You Meet Them

As an employer or hiring manager, you may find yourself interviewing a skilled service technician with the right certifications and experience for your open position. You're within reach of filling a key position in today's very tight market. Yet you wonder, "Is this person for real?" or "How can I best ensure this is truly a good hire?" These are fair thoughts in an interview setting, because – let's face it – we all try to show our best sides here.

Are there ways to "read" a candidate for the attributes you strongly believe lead to success in our business, and specifically long, productive service to your company? Nothing foolproof, certainly, but we can apply an approach that works well with other business deals and partnerships: start with the facts, move on to the equally important human factors, and be sure to ask and answer the big, critical questions. You're both hoping for a long-term relationship, and honesty on both sides is a key.

This discussion will lead us to an interviewing approach based on providing opportunities for candidates to be open with the information you need and – equally critical – to show and demonstrate their strengths. Such an approach gives you a great chance to make the right hire, more often, in a tough and competitive marketplace.

What Facts Do We Know Going In?

Let's start with what skilled technicians and other professionals know: if you're interviewing, you're looking to solve a problem by acquiring their in-demand skills. They may look carefully at your comments on the financial strength of the company, demands on their position, and opportunities for growth. Why? Because it's only sensible for you to present your dealership in the most favorable light... and for both employer and jobseeker to be cautious.

What do you know for sure about your candidate? At this point – before you've done any reference or background checks – just what that person tells you, on paper and in conversation.

You're working with an education and employment history, plus a description of duties and performance on the job. Again, caution often rules: no one has to tell you that bad hires are costly and painful, and that piece of paper leaves a lot of room for interpretation.

Beginning in the Comfort Zone

Still, it's important not to let caution go beyond healthy skepticism. You are looking to make a match in this situation, not to rule out good candidates – just as your candidate wants to discover and believe in a better job opportunity.

Asking and allowing the candidate to talk through their own job history can serve several important purposes. It keeps the conversation in the "comfort zone" of facts and history, and may answer concerns you have about resume gaps or other issues. By listening carefully, you may also learn about the candidate's motivations and decision-making process, setting the stage for a more personal discussion about current goals and needs.

In return, you can offer your own insight into your company's culture, direction, and philosophy. The next best thing to fact is first-hand account, and you are opening the door to good questions from the candidate as you continue to establish honesty as the guideline for your interview conversation.

Learning What We Really Want To Know

After establishing a common understanding of the facts, you will want to steer the conversation to gain insight into your candidate's reliability, problem-solving approach, commitment level, and countless other important characteristics. Although this is a tall order, involving more art and instinct than science, you have an important advantage: you get to ask the questions.

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This is precisely where an emphasis on providing opportunities for the candidate to shine can pay real dividends. Good technicians, like many other service-oriented professionals, are accustomed to thinking in “problem/solution” terms. As a result, many are far more comfortable describing a situation and their approach to it than they are answering abstract or theoretical questions. In other words, they can often tell a good story – and the story may tell you a lot about the person telling it.

So, you may have much more success with a question like, “How did you deal with a recent unhappy customer?,” than one like, “How would you describe your problem-solving approach?”. Even better, you can try describing a recent real-world issue in your own company and asking the candidate how they believe they would address it.

Don't Skip the Biggest Questions

Both employer and candidate want to know, “Can you meet my needs?,” and “What will make you happy (or, at least, satisfied)?”. Although these huge, mutual questions are too complex to ask and answer, they lead us directly to some others we shouldn't leave out of the mix.

Even as we focus on providing opportunities, there is ultimately no substitute for a direct question. Tough, legitimate questions for the candidate include, “What is the main reason you are considering leaving your current position?”. You can expect a direct answer, but must also accept that answer according to the realities of the industry.

There are strong, valid reasons to make a change. According to Copier Careers' 2005 Technician Salary Survey (available at www.copiercareers.com), top-ranking reasons include desire for:

- **More job stability**
- **Less stress**
- **Work in a different geographic location**
- **Higher compensation**
- **Increased ability to meet personal/family needs**

A candidate who is able to articulate the reasons for making a change is, in fact, demonstrating character and assertiveness, among other qualities we want in our employees. Viewing these tough but necessary questions as still more opportunities to see candidates' strengths can help keep the conversation in balance. We need to focus on the likelihood of our company meeting that clearly identified need, and the candidate's ability to meet our needs in return.

Evaluation—Adding Up The Facts and Impressions

In deciding whether to pursue your service technician candidate further, or even extend an offer, you will probably rely on both science and art. You've (1) established the facts, (2) provided opportunities for the candidate to shine, and (3) addressed the big questions about candidate and company needs.

With the information and impressions you have, you need to draw conclusions about personal qualities as well as “hard skills.” In many cases, you'll find that a candidate jumped on the opportunities to provide evidence of the qualities you want, such as:

- **Honesty, Character, Integrity**
- **Resourcefulness**
- **Solid Problem-Solving Approach**
- **Reliability and Level-Headedness**
- **Solid Communication & “People” Skills**

Anytime we are able to add a little more science to the fine art of successful hiring, it's welcome assistance in addressing a real challenge. When talent is at a premium, your ability to recognize potential and fill positions efficiently becomes more important than ever. In today's marketplace, providing opportunities for your candidates to put their “best foot forward” is a business essential.